

**Testimony**  
**Submitted to the Education Committee**  
**March 7, 2011**  
**HB 6502 An Act Concerning the Open Choice Program**

Representative Fleischmann, Senator Stillman and fellow members of the Education Committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today.

My name is Peggy Roell and I am Chair of the Avon Board of Education. I am testifying today in favor of HB 6502, An Act Concerning the Open Choice Program.

The Town of Avon was not a party in the Sheff litigation. Yet, understanding the importance of diverse learning communities, our taxpayers, for over 10 years, have supported the effort to desegregate Hartford Public Schools. We currently have 74 Hartford children in Avon's schools through the Open Choice program – approximately 2% of our enrollment--even as our school district has experienced over a fifty percent increase in enrollment in the last 15 years and have continuously faced tight budgets because of this unprecedented growth. The availability of additional seats in Avon may be threatened by budget reductions resulting in teacher reductions and class size increases.

All districts in the state are trying to maintain the instructional integrity and program quality in their schools in a cost effective manner while remaining sensitive and responsive to the current fiscal conditions. The average cost of educating one student in the Capital Region in 2007 was \$12,745. The \$2,500 currently received by suburban districts to educate one student through the Open Choice Program hardly compares to these average costs.

I believe the proposed tiered funding formula in HB 6502 is a big step in the right direction. It not only addresses some of the cost differential but would also encourage Boards of Education to increase the numbers of Choice Students in their district in order to get the additional per student funding. I see this as a win win win...a win for the additional Hartford students who will be able to attend school in less racially isolated environments...a win for the local districts to have monies to provide additional services to all of their students and a win for the state in helping to meet the benchmarks agreed to in the Sheff Comprehensive Management Plan.

I am fearful that without the tiered funding, as Boards of Education need to make major budget reductions, and face teacher reductions and increases in class size, the continued voluntary efforts of socially conscious school districts to support the goal of encouraging children to cross district lines to reduce the racially isolated schools will be threatened.

HB 6502 addresses district concerns about the legitimate and essential costs for education, and allow districts to meet or exceed Open Choice enrollment projections, hire teachers as needed to maintain class sizes, and assist children to socially and emotional adjust to their new school environs.

If the state is serious about achieving the goals of Sheff, including improving the quality of education and seeking more opportunities for children to attend more mixed income and non-racially isolated schools, then the state must take responsibility for fully funding this effort. Thank you for your time.